

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A situation controller for a vehicle, the situation controller comprising:
5 a processing device;
an image monitor, coupled to the processing device, for monitoring images associated with one or more items within the vehicle;
means for communicating a message relating to the one or more monitored items, wherein the content of the message is determined by the processing device based at least in part
10 on the one or more monitored items; and
a controller, coupled to the processing device, for controlling at least one function of the vehicle in response to the one or more monitored items.
2. The situation controller as recited in claim 1, wherein the means for
15 communicating a message comprises an interactive communication system that is capable of communicating with at least one person regarding the items in the vehicle.
3. The situation controller as recited in claim 2, wherein the interactive communication system comprises communicating with the at least one person via at least one of
20 a telephone, e-mail and a pager.
4. The situation controller as recited in claim 1, wherein the at least one function of the vehicle comprises one or more of opening and closing a window, locking and unlocking a door, sending an alarm to a driver, preventing a door from closing, providing control of the
25 vehicle remotely.
5. The situation controller as recited in claim 1, wherein the controller controls the at least one function of the vehicle in response to at least one of the message and a response to the message.

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6. The situation controller as recited in claim 1, further comprising at least one sensor, coupled to an input of the processing device, for sensing a situation associated with the automobile.

5 7. The situation controller as recited in claim 6, wherein the at least one sensor comprises at least one of a microphone, a thermometer, and an odor sensor.

8. The situation controller as recited in claim 1, wherein the processing device further comprises a network interface to facilitate transmission of a message.

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9. The situation controller as recited in claim 1, wherein the processing device comprises a processor and memory, wherein software for the situation controller is stored in the memory and executed by the processor.

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10. The situation controller as recited in claim 1, further comprising an instruction controller, coupled to the processing device, for defining a hierarchy of relevant importance associated with the message.

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11. The situation controller as recited in claim 1, further comprising at least one second image monitor for monitoring items outside of the vehicle.

12. A method of controlling at least one function of a vehicle, the method comprising the steps of:

transmitting data, relating to a situation in the vehicle, to a processing device;

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processing the data in the processing device and transmitting the processed data to a situation definer;

defining the situation in the situation definer and transmitting the defined situation to a situation controller;

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recommending a course of action to be taken with respect to vehicle controls in view of the defined situation;

communicating a message including the defined situation and recommended course of action; and

transmitting a signal to the vehicle controls to control a function of the vehicle.

5 13. The method as recited in claim 12 wherein the communicating step includes the step of communicating a message to a driver of the vehicle indicating that a key for the vehicle ignition was left in the vehicle.

10 14. The method as recited in claim 12 wherein the communicating step includes the step of communicating a message to a driver of the vehicle indicating that a child was left in the vehicle and a temperature within the vehicle has reached a predetermined temperature value.

15 15. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein a sensor is positioned within the vehicle for sensing at least one situation in the vehicle.

16. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the data is transmitted to the processing device from at least one of a video data source and an audio data source.

20 17. The method as recited in claim 12 further comprising the step of defining a hierarchy of relevant importance associated with two or more situations that are defined in the situation definer.

25 18. An article of manufacture for controlling at least one function of a vehicle, the article comprising a machine readable medium containing one or more programs which when executed implement the steps of:

transmitting data, relating to a situation in the vehicle, to a processing device;

processing the data in the processing device and transmitting the processed data to a situation definer;

30 defining the situation in the situation definer and transmitting the defined situation to a situation controller;

recommending a course of action to be taken with respect to the vehicle controls
in view of the defined situation;

communicating a message including the defined situation and recommended
course of action; and

5 transmitting a signal to vehicle controls to control a function of the vehicle.

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